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Research Article

Rewards and Learners' Engagement in L2 Classes: A Case Study in an Indonesian High School Context

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KEYWORDS

Case study;
 Engagement;
 Praise;
 Rewards;
 Second/foreign language (L2).

ABSTRACT

The present study intends to investigate the types of rewards given to learners in English as a second/foreign language (L2) classes and L2 learners' views on the possible effects of rewards on their engagement. The study employed a case study design with class observations and semi-structured interviews as the methods of data collection. Indonesian high school learners at a private university participated in this study. Through the observations, it was found that learners received three types of rewards: verbal praise, non-verbal praise, and social reward. From the interviews, it was found that rewards could make the learning atmosphere more fun and competitive as well as increase learners' attentiveness. Nonetheless, rewards alone were not sufficient to engage learners in independent learning requiring them to exert more effort in their L2 learning process. Overall this study contributes to the understanding of rewards in the Indonesian high school L2 context which is thus far fairly under-researched. Among others, this study concludes that teachers should know what kinds of rewards, when and how they are delivered to best achieve the intended effects. Suggested directions for relevant studies in the field are also stated alongside the possible limitations of this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers have been using rewards for a long time. The idea of rewards in the concept of positive reinforcement originated from a study by E. L. Thorndike in human behaviours in the field of psychology in the late 19th century. He introduced *the law of effect* stating that when a behaviour is followed by something pleasant, the behaviour is likely to be repeated (Stellar and Stellar, 1985). Rewards can be offered to learners in many ways when an expected behaviour of learners is carried out or certain circumstances occur. Types of rewards include tangible ones such as gifts (pucks of pencils, books, etc.)

and intangible ones such as extra scores, fun activities, verbal praise, non-verbal praise, and social rewards such as leaving the class earlier, being appointed as group leader, or other class privileges. Several studies on rewards mentioned the uses of certificates of appreciation (Indrawati, et. al., 2021; Loi & Uyen, 2016; Prawiro. et. al., 2019), verbal and non-verbal praises (Floress, et. al., 2018; Reinke, et. al., 2013), monetary reward (Liu, 2022), chips or stars that could be collected for positive behaviour (Arisandi, et. al., 2018; Sapta, et. al., 2017).

Rewards may be closely related to learners' engagement as a form of positive behaviour. Engagement refers to a positive manner of someone indicated by a high level of energy or enthusiasm (Schaufeli, et. al., 2006). It is learners' way of directing their attention towards the task being performed at that moment. Learners' engagement has been a topic of interest in L2 research as it is believed to be a potent barometer of learning outcomes. In a general education context involving 255 Romanian undergraduate learners Sulea, et. al. (2015) found that the agreeableness and conscientiousness of learners correlated positively with their level of engagement. Learners with a high level of engagement were more likely to have high ambition, be centred on objectives, and be collaborative inside the classroom. In line with that, in Russia, a quantitative study by Baranova, et. al. (2019) reported that engagement correlated positively with learning outcomes. From the findings of mentioned studies, it can be concluded that engaged learners are more likely to comply with the teacher's instructions and achieve better performance.

There are three dimensions of learners' engagement which are behavioural, cognitive, and emotional aspects (Han, 2021) and rewards, as far as a plethora of studies in the field have reported, may affect learners' engagement to learning, at least, in affective and behavioural domains. The affective aspect of engagement, in this case, refers to the learners' emotional response to learning. Several qualitative studies conducted in Indonesia reported that learners felt happy when their teacher provided rewards to whoever was able to do the desired behaviour expected from teachers (Damayanti, et. al., 2021; Pangesti, 2022; Saraswati, et. al., 2020). Learners also reported an increased level of enthusiasm or interest in the learning process (Indrawati, et. al., 2021; Pangesti, 2022). Furthermore, in an Algerian middle school context, a study also reported that learners felt an increased level of self-confidence whenever they were given rewards in classrooms (Boucekara, et. al., 2018).

Another aspect of engagement that is often perceived as the whole spectrum of engagement is behavioural. It is referred to observable behaviours that learners are willing to do as they are being engaged in the learning process. Several studies reported an increased willingness to learn lessons (Kasyulita & Armelida, 2019; Pangesti, 2022;

Saraswati, et. al., 2020). In their study in Indonesia with elementary school learners, Cahya, et. al. (2018) found that learners were more open in expressing their opinions and did not feel afraid of making mistakes after being given rewards. Next, student compliance might emerge as the effect of rewards. Rayane (2019) in her study in Algeria found that learners would do several actions such as paying more attention to the teacher and following the classroom's rules when there was a possibility of receiving rewards. However, rewards may also have side effects. A study in Turkey by Aypay (2018) reported that excessively giving rewards to learners could increase their addiction to it. In India, Visaria, et. al. (2016) also mentioned that negative impacts of rewards may occur after the rewards were no longer available in the class or after they were removed. For example, learners had a lower attendance rate in the post-rewards period. Hence, teachers should understand how to best optimise rewards for learners' learning.

Related to this, Haydon, et. al. (2020) mentioned five critical factors – contingency, immediacy, proximity, consistency, and specificity – that affect the effectiveness of rewards in the form of praise. When the target behaviour occurs, praise should follow (contingency). For praise to be effective, it needs to be delivered immediately after the behaviour occurs (immediacy). It may especially be the case if the behaviour has not been fully mastered by learners. That is to increase the likelihood of that behaviour being repeated in the future. They further mentioned that praise is also better to be given when the target learners are near to ensure they notice when being praised (proximity). Furthermore, teacher praise should be given consistently, it should not be unpredictable as it can confuse learners (consistency). Furthermore, praise should also specify desirable behaviours and provide sufficient feedback about the correctness of learners' behaviours (specificity). Though in reality, it may not be possible to incorporate all of these factors, the more praise accommodating these principles, the more effective.

The impact of rewards may also be beyond learners; it may affect the classroom atmosphere. In Indonesia, a study by Damayanti, et. al. (2021) reported that learners felt the class became more interesting to follow once rewards were implemented, echoing an earlier study by Frymier and Houser (2018) suggesting that rewards in the

form of teacher praise could stimulate L2 learning enjoyment. In line with that, a recent study involving Thai learners of English also reported that learners felt relaxed in the learning process when rewards were given and it made the class more enjoyable for learning (Phungphai and Boonmoh, 2021). Furthermore, rewards may also stimulate competition in class. A recent experimental study involving Chinese university learners of English reported a positive impact of competition on learning (Chen, 2022). Outside the L2 learning context, a study involving 246 undergraduate learners in the US by Shimotsu-Dariol, et. al. (2012) reported that competitive learners tended to be more active and involved in the learning process, suggesting the merit of competition in learning. However, competition in class may also induce peer comparison leading to anxiety, especially for learners with low self-confidence or proficiency (Koga, 2010; Subekti, 2018). Thus, teachers should aware of this possibility and mitigate it.

There have been many studies about rewards conducted in various L2 contexts, for example in the Philippines (Pajarillo-Aquino, 2019), China (Liu, 2022), Taiwan (Chen, et. al., 2017) and Indonesia (Cahya, et. al., 2018; Kasyulita & Armelida, 2019; Saptia, et. al., 2017). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, there is only a study investigating rewards and learners' engagement simultaneously and it was conducted outside the L2 context involving elementary school learners in the US (Filsecker and Hickey, 2014). Such a study in an L2 context, let alone in Indonesia, may be very rare. Furthermore, English lesson is mandatory for all high school learners regardless of the majors or streams (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2003). Because of that, there is a possibility that some learners are not interested in learning English in the first place. Hence, Indonesian high school English teachers need to find ways for making learners engaged in learning. Besides, studies about rewards in Indonesia were mostly conducted involving young learners at the elementary school level (Cahya, et. al., 2018; Saraswati, et. al., 2020) and junior high school level (Damayanti, et. al., 2021; Kasyulita & Armelida, 2019; Lubis, 2018; Maulana & Budianto, 2022). For this reason, conducting a study involving Indonesian high school learners may provide merits pedagogically and theoretically.

Considering the rationales, the following research questions are formulated. First, how do learners

receive rewards in L2 classes? Second, what are learners' views on the possible effects of rewards on learners' engagement?

METHOD

Research Design

This present study employed a qualitative case study design focusing on the uniqueness of a phenomenon through in-depth and rich descriptions (Basit, 2010). It employed qualitative observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations were conducted to answer the first research question on how learners received rewards. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to answer the second research question on how rewards affected learners' engagement.

The qualitative methods in this study honoured "an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of reporting the complexity of a situation" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:41), in line with the purpose of a case study aiming for particularity or uniqueness. Many studies investigating rewards in the L2 contexts employed qualitative methods as well (Cahya, et. al., 2018; Damayanti, et. al., 2021; Saraswati, et. al., 2020; Ulfaminingsih, et. al., 2021), suggesting the popularity in the field. This study was conducted with the constructivism paradigm in mind. It sought a deeper understanding of a real-life situation as the focus where meanings were interpreted from individuals' perspectives (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Research Setting and Participants

The setting of the present study was a private senior high school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. There were two reasons why this study involved high school learners. First, among all stages of formal education in Indonesia, senior high school learners are required to take English lessons (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2003). Because of that, there is a possibility that not some learners are not very interested in the lesson, thus it can pose challenges for teachers to engage them in the learning process. Second, studies investigating rewards from learners' viewpoints in the Indonesian L2 context were mostly conducted in elementary schools (Cahya, et. al., 2018; Saraswati, et. al., 2020) and junior high schools (Damayanti, et. al., 2021; Kasyulita & Armelida, 2019; Lubis, 2018; Maulana & Budianto,

2022). Such studies conducted in a senior high school are, to the best of our knowledge, very rare, and thus worth to be conducted.

The research participants of this study were L2 learners from Grade 10 and Grade 11. More specifically, four English classes, two from Grade 10 (Class A and Class B), and the other two from Grade 11 (Class C and Class D) were observed. One teacher (Dian; pseudonym) taught Class A and Class B, and another (Tina; pseudonym) taught Class C and Class D. Furthermore, four learner participants who received rewards most frequently per the observation data were invited for interviews. The details can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The Participants of the Study

| No | Class | Number of Observed Participants | Number of Interviewed Participants |
|----|---------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Class A | 27 | 2 |
| 2 | Class B | 25 | 2 |
| 3 | Class C | 11 | - |
| 4 | Class D | 28 | - |

As seen in Table 1, there was no interviewed participant from Class C and Class D because the teacher who taught these two classes did not implement any observable rewarding system per the results of the class observations.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study were an observation checklist, field notes, and an interview checklist. The observation checklist was used to investigate in what circumstances learners received rewards from their respective teachers. The main points of the observation checklist were 1) the description of rewards, 2) when rewards were given, 3) how rewards were given, and 4) learners' responses to the rewards. The checklist was provided on paper which became field notes as well. Furthermore, the interview questions were inspired by Classroom Engagement Inventory (CEI) developed by Wang, et. al. (2014). Several statements in the CEI were modified into eight interview questions to find answers to the second research question on the possible effects of rewards on engagement. An example of the question is "Are you more willing to answer questions or express

opinions after you have been praised by the teacher?"

Ethical Consideration

The present study was conducted whilst respecting ethical principles. First, it obtained permission from the school where the study was about to be conducted as well as the teachers whose classes were observed, suggesting it secured the gatekeeper's consent (Ramrathan, et. al., 2016). Second, before each interview was conducted, each interviewee was given explanations of the purposes of the study as well as their rights and responsibilities orally and in written forms through the online consent form. When the participants agreed to participate in this study, they indicated their willingness in the consent form. Consent forms are essential as it shows the participants' understanding of the provision of this study and agreement before a study commences (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The interview questions were made as short and clear as possible for time efficiency. Such practices illustrate the principle of non-maleficence, which means no inconvenience should be experienced by the participants (Kendrick, et. al., 2008). Furthermore, the interview participants were given monetary rewards, suggesting the implementation of the beneficence principle, where researchers do good to the participants (Israel and Hay, 2006). In this study, pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

After the permission to conduct the study was granted by the principal and the coordinator of the curriculum at the school, class observations were conducted. Four classes were proposed by the curriculum coordinator per the availability of the teachers in the respective classes. Observations on Class A and Class B were conducted on 4 October 2022 whilst those on Class C and Class D were conducted on 6 October 2022. To answer the first research question on how learners received rewards, the types of rewards found in the class observations were analysed using the following questions: 1) "What were the rewards?", 2) "How were they delivered?", 3) "When (or in what situations) were the rewards given?", and 4) "What were learners' responses?"

From the observations, four learners were seen to receive rewards. Two learners were from Class A

and the two others were from Class B. No learners received rewards in Class C and Class D. The four learners receiving rewards were invited for online interviews via the *Zoom* platform. The interviews were conducted from 16 October 2022 until 22 October 2022. Each of them lasted between 16 to 22 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian, the participants' L1 to allow more comprehensive responses and increase the participants' willingness to be interviewed in the first place. The interview data were fully transcribed and translated into

English. Using thematic analysis, the interview transcripts were coded based on the participants' similar words or responses relevant to the second research question, thus reoccurring relevant themes would emerge. The recurring themes would answer the second research question. Excerpts best representing each theme are provided in this report and the names of the interviewees were anonymised using the following pseudonyms: Vano, Imam, Rio, and Dion. The sequence of the data collection and analysis can be observed in Figure 1.

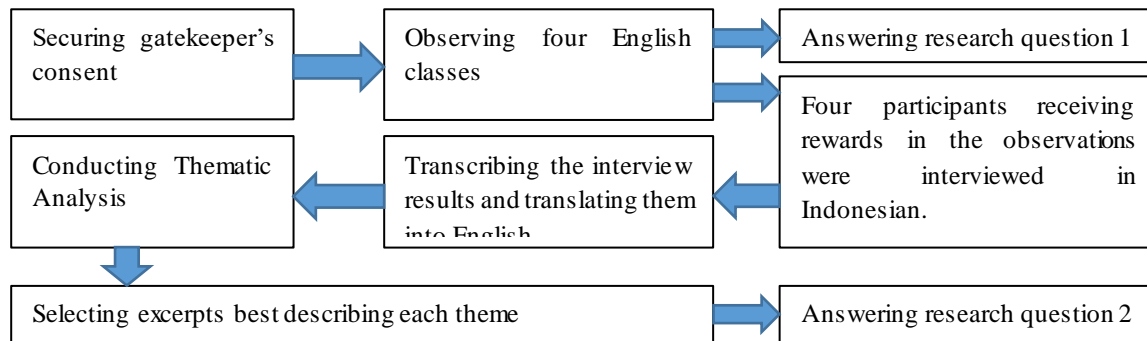


Figure 1. The sequence of Data Collection and Analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The way learners received rewards

Several types of rewards were found in class A and Class B, taught by Dian. In Class A, she presented verbal praises and social rewards throughout the

lesson. In Class B, she presented more types of rewards which were verbal praises, non-verbal praises, and social rewards. In comparison, in Class C and Class D, the teacher, Tina, did not present any types of rewards. The summary of the four class observations can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the Class Observations

| No | Class Observations | Types of Rewards | Occurrence | Description of Rewards |
|----|------------------------|------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Observation on Class A | Verbal praise | It occurred mostly at the beginning of the lesson and the intensity decreased throughout the lesson. Almost all learners who answered a question received this reward. | The teacher said “correct”, “good”, “good job”, “nice”, and “excellent”. |
| | | Social reward | It occurred one time in the middle of the lesson. 7 out of 27 learners received the reward. | The teacher appointed some learners to be group leaders. |
| 2 | Observation on Class B | Verbal praise | It occurred mostly at the beginning of the lesson and the intensity decreased throughout the lesson. Almost all learners who answered a question received this reward. | The teacher said “good”, “nice”, and “yes, exactly”. |

| No | Class Observations | Types of Rewards | Occurrence | Description of Rewards |
|----|------------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| | | Non-verbal praise | It occurred one time in the middle of the lesson. One learner received this reward. | The teacher gave applause. |
| | | Social reward | It occurred one time in the middle of the lesson. 6 out of 25 students received the reward. | The teacher appointed some learners to be group leaders. |
| 3 | Observation on Class C | - | - | - |
| 4 | Observation on Class D | - | - | - |

Verbal praise

Verbal praise was the most common type of reward used in the observed classes. It was presented in both Class A and Class B. The teacher, Dian, applied this type of reward by giving verbal approvals. Verbal praises such as 'correct', 'good', 'good job', 'nice', and 'excellent' were given in Class A and verbal praises such as 'good', 'nice', and 'yes, exactly' were given in Class B. The verbal praises in Class A and Class B were given mostly at the beginning of the lesson – pre-task – when Dian was introducing the topic for the day. She introduced the topic through a question-and-answer session. Learners who could answer her questions through their background knowledge were given verbal praise. Verbal praises were also given during the instructional process.

Furthermore, learners praised verbally did not show any distinctive expressions. This absence of reaction may suggest how commonly that reward was used by the teacher. The verbal praises presented in Class A and Class B fall under the definition of General Praise (GP) as it means a broad statement of approvals not highlighting specific behaviours (Reinke, et. al., 2013). The finding of this study suggesting the frequent uses of verbal praise corresponded to the findings of previous studies in general education contexts in the US. In a study by Reinke, et. al. (2013), 33 teachers in three elementary schools used GP frequently with 0.43 praises per minute. This was similar to the findings of a study by Floress, et. al. (2018) reporting that GP was most likely to be used by teachers in 28 observed classrooms by 0.48 praises per minute. As far as the present study was concerned, when a reward was easily received by learners, they might

undervalue it or take it for granted, as seen in the absence of reactions by learners receiving such rewards.

The use of verbal praise by the teacher in Class A and Class B can be said to be per the guidelines for the effective use of praise (Haydon, et. al., 2020). Immediacy and consistency seemed to have been implemented by the teachers. Immediacy was shown by immediate praise given by the teachers every time a learner answered a question. Consistency was shown by fairly applied praise to almost all learners who answered a question. With the congruence of the use of verbal praise with these guidelines, it could be concluded that the teacher in Class A and Class B had implemented verbal praise effectively.

Non-verbal praise

The non-verbal praise was only given in Class B, in the form of applause. Learners were given a task to write down objects presented in a video describing a city as many as they could. When the teacher brought up a question related to this task, a learner quickly raised his hand to respond, and he mentioned more things compared to his peers. This made the teacher give him applause and it is followed by other learners too. The learner praised through the applauses showed a smiling reaction and his face was blushing.

Based on Haydon et al.'s (2020) guidelines for the effective use of praise, the delivery of applause as non-verbal praise is appropriate when viewed from the immediacy factor but not from the consistency factor. Throughout the lesson in Class B, only one learner received applause from the teacher and his classmates. This showed the rarity of the occasion and this may have made the learner receiving the

reward feel specialised as seen by his blushing face. Related to this, Nikolić, et. al. (2018) in their study in the Netherlands found that learners given inflated praise have more possibilities for blushing compared to learners who were praised normally. This may especially be the case for highly anxious learners. In this case, the effect of the applause can be either positive or negative. The applause given by the teacher may have negative impacts on learners if the consistency factor of effective use of praise is not considered. For example, when one learner receives praise for a certain behaviour, learners exhibiting the same behaviours should also receive praise. If such praise is given unpredictably, it may confuse learners (Haydon et al., 2020). This should come to teachers' attention when using non-verbal praise. However, for some learners who are low-achieving and need more support, such rarely-used praise may boost their confidence in learning.

Social rewards

The social type of reward was given by the teacher by appointing some learners to be group leaders. Seven learners were selected to be the group leaders in Class A whilst six were selected as the group leader in Class B. As observed, learners who were chosen as group leaders were either those actively engaged in class or those who did unrelated conversations with friends during class discussions. When the teacher asked the chosen group leaders to write the names of their group members on the whiteboard, they did not quickly get up from their seats. The teacher had to tell them once again to come forward.

To the best of our knowledge, such studies examining learners' responses to social rewards are very rare. However, learners' hesitation to receive the opportunity to lead a group discussion may be attributed to several factors. Some might feel more comfortable completing tasks, studying, or doing projects on their own rather than with the help of classmates. A study by Lin (2019) in Taiwan reported that some learners found group work more difficult to do than individual work as they were not familiar with all of their classmates. They may become hesitant in such situations (Subekti, 2019). As found in the class observations in the present study, learners did not seem to appreciate the social reward given by their teacher. It was also possibly due to the frequent use of this reward by the teacher that learners could barely see it as such.

As observed, all rewards used by the teacher in Class A and Class B were intangible rewards. Tangible rewards such as monetary rewards, gifts (for example, books and pens), stars, and plaques as signs of appreciation were not used. Teachers may easily provide intangible rewards in every meeting. In comparison, teachers need more resources like money and time to prepare for such tangible rewards and thus such rewards are commonly used with less frequency. This may explain the absence of tangible rewards in the observations.

Learners' views on the possible effects of rewards on learners' engagement

This study found four recurring themes regarding the possible effects of rewards on learners' engagement. These results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Learners' Views on the Possible Effects of Rewards on Engagement

| | |
|---------|---|
| Theme 1 | Learners tended to pay more attention after being praised. |
| Theme 2 | Rewards stimulated a competitive classroom atmosphere. |
| Theme 3 | The more learners got appreciated, the more enjoyable the class tended to be. |
| Theme 4 | Praise did not improve learners' independent learning. |

Theme 1. Learners tended to pay more attention after being praised.

Learners reported that they would pay more attention to materials given by their teacher if there was a possibility to receive praise or verbal reward. They felt encouraged by the teacher's praise. Regarding this, Imam and Vano stated:

"When I was praised ... I was more in the mood to learn and more willing to focus on the materials that were taught." [Imam]

"If that's the case (being praised), maybe I would pay more attention. I would pay more attention because it

felt like I'm being encouraged."
[Vano]

This finding was in line with the finding of the study by Haydon, et. al. (2020) reporting that praise correlated positively with learners' compliance and correlated negatively with learners' off-task behaviours. As learners paid more attention to the teacher's instructions, the chance for any off-task behaviours decreased. The finding also conformed to that reported by Shernoff, et. al. (2020). They reported that praise increases learners' compliance, attention, and on-task behaviours. The more praise was given, the more likely learners were to listen to their teachers and act on their instructions. Seen from another perspective, however, teachers should continually reflect on when and how praise is given so that it can give encouragement and motivate learners rather than merely nurturing compliance.

Theme 2. Rewards stimulated a competitive classroom atmosphere.

Learners reported that the use of rewards at times stimulated a sense of competitiveness among them. They acknowledged that when their teacher gave rewards to their classmates, the feeling of jealousy emerged as they wondered who could be more appreciated by the teacher. Regarding this, Vano and Imam stated:

"Maybe in a situation like that (the teacher gave rewards to classmates), emerged a competitive feeling – like who can be appreciated more."
[Vano]

"It's like a feeling of curiosity ... How can his answer or opinion be appreciated more whilst mine is not."
[Imam]

From the excerpts, it can be seen that praise could stimulate a competitive atmosphere in class. On a positive note about competitive learners, Shimotsu-Dariol, et. al. (2012) in their study in the US found that learners with a high level of competitiveness strive for high academic achievement, ask more questions, and raise more comments in class. In line with that, an experimental study in China also found that L2 learners placed in a competitive classroom had greater inner or intrinsic motivation and interest compared to learners placed in a classroom that presented no competition (Chen, 2022). In other

words, competitive learners appeared to exhibit involvement behaviours associated with desired learning outcomes. Seen from another perspective, however, the sense of competitiveness could also impact the learning process negatively. The desire for praise from teachers may take off the learners' focus from fully understanding the materials. Besides, a competitive atmosphere may also instil peer comparison leading to anxiety in some learners (Subekti, 2018). To conclude, the sense of competitiveness served as a double-edged sword for the learning process. Hence, teachers should consider both sides in using rewards for bringing up a competitive atmosphere in their classes.

Theme 3. The more learners got appreciated, the more enjoyable the class tended to be.

Some learners reported that the more they got appreciated, the more enjoyable the class tended to be. Vano and Rio stated:

"If the compliment isn't just about that (academic competence), maybe about something else, so everyone can get compliments, not just one or two, but the whole class, (that) will be better."
[Vano]

"For a class to be more fun, it is when all of them get appreciation." [Rio]

As seen from the excerpts, compliments from teachers could make a more fun learning atmosphere provided that compliments were given fairly and to more learners in class. A similar finding was found in a study in Thailand reporting learners' excitement when rewards were given (Phungphai & Boonmoh, 2021). The more rewards were available in their classroom, the more engaged they were. Regarding this, Frymier and Houser (2018) stated that positive communication between teachers and learners such as praise could influence learners' positive responses such as L2 learning enjoyment, conducive to accomplishing better learning.

Theme 4. Praise did not improve learners' independent learning.

Despite several roles of rewards in affecting learners' engagement reported in the three previous themes, this study also found the inability of rewards in increasing learners' desire to study independently. They would not read the materials by themselves to understand the topic just because praise was

available for anyone who could show their understanding of the materials. Imam and Dion, for example, stated:

“In my opinion, it (self-studying) depends on whether I'm interested in the materials or not, (not because of the rewards from the teachers)”
[Imam]

“Just like before, if I understand the lesson, I become more excited, but if I do not understand the lesson, I'm not enthusiastic about doing the task. If the task is difficult, I'm less enthusiastic and if the task is easy, I'm enthusiastic.” [Dion]

Imam also mentioned that his willingness or unwillingness to be engaged in the relevant discussion was not affected by whether he would be praised. He stated:

“If I want to discuss with friends, I will do it even if not being praised”
[Imam]

This theme was seemingly in contrast to the theme on the role of rewards in improving learners' attentiveness. These differences may indicate that praise may only affect engagement which required relatively minimum effort, for example, paying attention – listening to what the teacher was saying. Praise may not be sufficient to positively affect learners' engagement requiring them to be the main actors of their learning. Learners' engagement in activities such as independent study may not be evoked by rewards alone. Various intertwined factors may be at play. Perceived little relevance of the materials (Sulistiyono, 2016) and little exposure to the language (Kirkpatrick, 2012) largely attributed to the position of English as a foreign language in Indonesia may affect their unwillingness to do independent learning even if praise is available for those excelling in L2 learning.

Overall, this qualitative study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between rewards and learners' engagement in the Indonesian high school L2 context among a plethora of studies on rewards focusing on younger learners, within or outside L2 contexts in Indonesia. In light of this study, several pedagogical implications can be suggested. Seeing that rewards bring advantages whilst also having limitations, teachers should

optimise the use of rewards in L2 classes. They should know what kinds of rewards, when and how they are delivered to best achieve the intended effects. Rewards alone are not sufficient in nurturing learners' independent learning. As such, a combination of supporting factors should also be met. For example, teachers provide materials with the right amount of challenge through class activities allowing learners to both feel challenged and more relaxed during the learning process. In such conditions, rewards can serve as the 'toppings' celebrating every little achievement learners make in their learning process.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study can be summarised as follows. From the class observations, it was found that L2 learners received three types of rewards, verbal praise, non-verbal praise, and social reward. All of these rewards were intangible. No tangible rewards were found during the observations. From the interviews, several findings were found. Rewards could stimulate a competitive classroom atmosphere and could make a more fun classroom atmosphere as well. Even though rewards could increase L2 learners' attentiveness in class, rewards alone seemed to be unable to engage learners to study L2 independently.

Furthermore, this study has at least two obvious limitations. Learners in two observed classes did not receive any rewards. The selection of the observed classes should have been preceded with some basic inquiries to the teachers as to whether they normally gave rewards in class. Second, only four participants were invited for interviews. More interview participants could have enriched the results of this study thus making the descriptions of the emerging theme more salient.

Finally, there are several suggestions for future studies. Qualitative studies on rewards could involve both teachers and learners to see whether they have the same perspectives on rewards. Furthermore, it is also worthwhile to conduct a survey study involving Indonesian high school learners of English irrespective of institutions on their views about the use of rewards they receive in their respective classes. Such a study may give a general picture from which many more relevant studies in the field can be conducted. Lastly, as praise was found to be unable to engage learners in independent learning, future studies can explore other possible teacher

factors potentially affecting learners' engagement or lack thereof.

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